

even more intimately revealing; but how
 many books are
 there in the world like his ? Besides, 'a good
 correspondent,
 like a good conversationalist, is better when
 addressing
 others than in soliloquy; and we may little
 guess how
 charming people can be, until they try to
 charm. The
 art of letters is, indeed, the most social and
 one of the
 most civilised of literary forms. It stands
 nearer even than
 sermon or moral essay to the art of life. The
 eighteenth
 century knew its value; and it does small
 credit to our
 modern culture that we have so suffered it
 to decay. To
 combine sensitiveness and good sense; to be
 spontaneous
 yet delicate, natural without vulgarity and
 negligent with-
 out slovenliness; to show at once gaiety and
 grace; to
 possess a mind of one's own, a style of one's
 own, one's
 own way of seeing and describing life's brief
 trifles—that
 was the eighteenth-century ideal of
 conversation; and those
 seem to me, in all ages, the essentials of good
 letter-writing.
 Small wonder, then, that women, with their
 keener
 sense for the graces of life, should have
 excelled since the
 days of Heloise in this branch of literature,
 so that it is
 dominated by figures like Dorothy Osborne,
 Madame de
 Sevigné, Madame du Deffand, Madame
 d'Epinay, Made-
 moiselle de Lespinasse, Lady Mary Wortley
 Montague,
 Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Barrett
 Browning and Jane
 Welsh Carlyle (both of whom write so much
 better than

their more famous husbands). Even their
most successful
male rivals, like Horace Walpole and poor
Cowper winding his worsted, have sometimes been
markedly feminine.
I have noticed the same thing in my own
experience; and
I have certainly known women who, with
that remarkable
power their sex sometimes shows of
withstanding any
amount of education, could only spell
precariously, and
yet wrote far better and more vivid letters
than some very
distinguished writers, alive and dead.